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Silent War Stepped Up In Vietnam

Saboteurs Harass North's Panhandle

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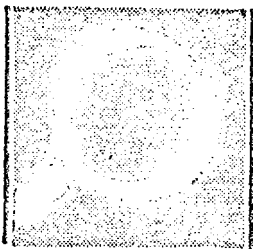
Miami Herald-Chicago Tribune Wire

SAIGON — Hanoi infrequently broadcasts mention "works of saboteurs" in North Vietnam's panhandle.

Saigon's vernacular press occasionally reports odd little aircraft accidents with nonmilitary planes in mountainous regions of Laos, northwestern South Vietnam, and sometimes in northeastern Thailand.

These are mere peeks by the general public at a tremendous, submerged iceberg of clandestine operations continuously and now increasingly carried out against the Communist north.

These actions probably never will be disclosed in full detail, but it can be said re-



BACKGROUND REPORT

sponsibly that today they constitute an important phase of this Southeast Asia battle.

It is a silent war. It is carried out by Special Forces and by mercenaries. It is a hit-and-run war in which units are airlifted or sea-borne deep into North Vietnam for demolition missions, for seizure of prisoners, for probing forays, and — it now is understood — for accumulation of information on

American prisoner of war camp locations.

THIS TYPE of action has been taking place in the North Vietnamese panhandle from the Demilitarized Zone to well north of Vinh during the last 60 days.

An increasing number of such raids has come from the seacoasts and from helicopter air-bridge links in Laos and Thailand to points where damage can be done or information obtained from the North Vietnamese, it was learned from reliable sources.

Communist broadcasts from Hanoi in the past have used "saboteur" in an ideological sense. Now they are referring to actual dynamitings. These raiders specialize in targets that are too difficult for bombers to identify from the air or are too well hidden to be spotted by aerial photography. They also carry out a traffic in agents not otherwise possible under present conditions.

REPORTS FILTERING from the Central Intelligence Agency and associated military establishments indicate that such raids may vary from 20 to several hundred men. They may stay in North Vietnam from a few minutes to 24 hours.

Mercenaries enlisted for such secret actions include Europeans, Chinese, Malays, Japanese and Americans. The operations are carefully planned and surrounded by the tight security.

The CIA now believes that the large-scale American attempt to free prisoners from a camp near Hanoi a year ago failed because of a security leak, which resulted in a prisoner shift.

The raiders are heavily armed. Not one operation has failed. And none of the raiders has been trapped, according to informed sources.

Casualties among these special forces have been low. Pay scales and morale are said to be quite high.

THE MYSTERIOUS, CIA-financed Air America civil flying fleet seems to operate on a supernational basis across Cambodian, Thai, Laotian and South Vietnamese borders. It has had a part in some of this work. However, much of the work is being done by military detachments temporarily posted to the Special Forces.

The military establishment here generally attempts to suppress mention of this side of the war for a number of reasons, with security against enemy knowledge being the least important. The North Vietnamese are fully aware of the nature of the CIA-directed and CIA-financed special operations.

It is known that after each such raid all civilians and military personnel in the north who have had contact with the raiders are subjected to rigorous and lengthy questioning by Communist secret police and political commissars.

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